

was by a lesser hand that He saved Zion from the wrath of Sennacherib. But Hezekiah is no subject for a prophet to dwell on. The prophecy we are studying has indeed its historical connexion with events which happened seven centuries before Christ came, but its true subject is a universal spiritual kingdom, and that kingdom is the Kingdom of Christ.

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## LITERARY ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE BIBLE.

### I. THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES.

i. 1 f. "There is an old Eastern fable about a traveller in the steppes who is attacked by a furious wild beast. To save himself the traveller gets into a dried-up well; but at the bottom of it he sees a dragon with its jaws wide open to devour him. The unhappy man dares not get out for fear of the wild beast, and dares not descend for fear of the dragon, so he catches hold of the branch of a wild plant growing in a crevice of the well. His arms soon grow tired, and he feels that he must soon perish, death waiting for him on either side. But he holds on still: and then he sees two mice, one black and one white, gnawing through the trunk of the wild plant, as they gradually and evenly make their way round it. The plant must soon give way, break off, and he must fall into the jaws of the dragon. The traveller sees this, and knows that he will inevitably perish; but, while still hanging on, he looks around him, and, finding some drops of honey on the leaves of the wild plant, he stretches out his tongue and licks them." After quoting this fable (translated, by the way, from Rückert, into English verse by Archbishop Trench, in his *Poems*, p. 266), Tolstoy (in *My Confession*) proceeds to apply it to modern life. He quotes the opening chapters

of Ecclesiastes as an expression of this Epicurean escape from the terrible plight in which people find themselves as they awaken to the fact of existence. The issue "consists in recognizing the hopelessness of life, and yet taking advantage of every good in it, in avoiding the sight of the dragon and mice, and in seeking the honey as best we can, especially where there is most of it. . . . Such is the way in which most people, who belong to the circle in which I move, reconcile themselves to their fate, and make living possible. They know more of the good than the evil of life from the circumstances of their position, and their blunted moral perceptions enable them to forget that all their advantages are accidental. . . . The dulness of their imaginations enables these men to forget what destroyed the peace of Buddha, the inevitable sickness, old age, and death, which to-morrow if not to-day must be the end of all their pleasures."

"In the case of a man belonging to another nature and another race, we might endeavour to conceive Paul in those latter days of his life as one who at last recognized he had spent his life for a dream, as one who repudiated all the holy prophets for a work which till then he had hardly read, viz. Ecclesiastes (a book instinct with charm, the one really loveable book ever written by a Jew), declaring the truly happy man to be he who, having lived his life joyfully to old age with the wife of his youth, dies without having lost his sons. It is characteristic of great Europeans to justify Epicurus at certain moments, to be seized with nausea amid their arduous toils, and even after succeeding in their efforts to begin to wonder whether, after all, the cause which they have served was worth such sacrifices. . . . We could wish that Paul had sometimes, like ourselves, sat down wearied by the wayside, and perceived how vain are fixed beliefs" (Renan's *L'Antéchrist*, pp. 101, 102).

“ Ecclesiastes and Proverbs display a larger compass of thought and of experience than seem to belong to a Jew or to a king ” (Gibbon).

“ After the fifth century the world lived on these words : *Vanity of vanities . . . one thing is needful*. The *Imitatio Christi* is undoubtedly the most perfect and attractive expression of this great poetic system ; but a modern mind cannot accept it save with considerable reserve. Mysticism overlooked that innate quality of human nature, curiosity, which makes men penetrate the secret of things, and become, as Leibnitz says, the mirror of the universe. . . . Ecclesiastes took the heavens to be a solid roof, and the sun a globe suspended some miles up in the air ; history, that other world, had no existence for him. Ecclesiastes, I am willing to believe, had felt all that man’s heart could feel ; but he had no suspicion of what man is allowed to know. The human mind in his day overpowered science ; in our day it is science that overpowers the human mind ” (Renan).

i. 2, 8. See *Imitatio Christi*, i. 1.

i. 9. “ We marvel at the prodigality of Nature, but how marvellous, too, the economy ! The old cycles are for ever renewed, and it is no paradox that he who would advance can never cling too close to the past. The thing that has been is the thing that will be again ; if we realize that, we may avoid many of the disillusionings, miseries, insanities, that for ever accompany the throes of new birth. Set your shoulder joyously to the world’s wheel ; you may spare yourself some unhappiness if, beforehand, you slip the Book of *Ecclesiastes* beneath your arm ” (Havelock Ellis). Cf. Jowett’s *Sermons on Faith and Doctrine*, pp. 282–283.

i. 11. *I was king in Jerusalem*. “ The possession of a throne could never yet afford a lasting satisfaction to an ambitious mind. This melancholy truth was felt and acknowledged by Severus. Fortune and merit had, from

an humble station, elevated him to the first place among mankind. 'He had been all things,' as he said himself, 'and all were of little value'" (Gibbon, ch. ii.).

i. 8, ii. 10-11, etc. "When I was a boy, I used to care about pretty stones. I got some Bristol diamonds at Bristol, and some dog-tooth spar in Derbyshire; my whole collection had cost perhaps three half-crowns, and was worth considerably less; and I knew nothing whatever, rightly, about any single stone in it—could not even spell their names; but words cannot tell the joy they used to give me. Now, I have a collection of minerals worth, perhaps, from two to three thousand pounds; and I know more about some of them than most other people. But I am not a whit happier, either for my knowledge or possessions, for other geologists dispute my theories, to my grievous indignation and discontentment; and I am miserable about all my best specimens, because there are better in the British Museum. No, I assure you, knowledge by itself will not make you happy" (Ruskin in *Fors Clavigera*). See also the discussion of this in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, I. i.-iii., and Ruskin's further apostrophe in *The Eagle's Nest*, 80.—"I began expounding, in order, the Book of Ecclesiastes. I never before had so clear a sight either of the meaning or the beauties of it. Neither did I imagine that the several parts of it were in so exquisite a manner connected together; all tending to prove that grand truth—that there is no happiness out of God" (*Wesley's Journal*, 1777).

i. 12 f.

"A king dwelt in Jerusalem;  
 He was the wisest man on earth;  
 He had all riches from his birth,  
 And pleasures till he tired of them;  
 Then, having tasted all things, he  
 Witnessed that all are vanity."

(C. G. Rossetti: see the whole poem, "A Testimony";

also her verses on "Vanity of Vanities," "Days of Vanity," "Cardinal Newman," and "The Heart knoweth its own Bitterness.")

"A word must be said about those exquisite gems of verse which are contained in the *Greek Anthology*. . . . The motto which is written on the pages as a whole is the same as that of the Book of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of vanities," *ματαιότης ματαιοτήτων*, and the dominant side of sadness deepens the farther we follow the poems into Roman times. Herodotus (v. 4) tells us of a Thracian tribe, whose custom it was to wail over the birth of a child, and to bury the dead with festive joy, as being released from their troubles. 'Let us praise the Thracians,' says a writer in the *Anthology*, 'in that they mourn for their sons as they come forth from their mother's womb into the sunlight, while those again they count blessed who have left life, snatched away by unseen Doom, the servant of the Fates.' One who had looked upon the course of the world and the treacherous ways of fortune is forced to exclaim: 'I hate the world for its mystery'" (S. H. Butcher).

i. 14. "Nature has furnished man with a rich provision of force, activity, and toughness. But what most often comes to his help is his unconquerable levity. By this he becomes capable of renouncing particular things at each moment, if he can only grasp at something new in the next. Then unconsciously we are constantly renewing our whole lives. We put one passion in place of another; business, inclinations, amusements, hobbies, we prove them all one after another, only to cry out that 'all is vanity.' No one is shocked at this false, nay, blasphemous speech. Nay, every one thinks that in uttering it he has said something wise and unanswerable. Few indeed are those who are strong enough to anticipate such unbearable feelings, and, in order to escape from all partial renuncia-

tions, to perform one all-embracing act of renunciation. These are the men who convince themselves of the existence of the eternal, of the necessary, of the universal, and who seek to form conceptions which cannot fail them, yea, which are not disturbed, but rather confirmed, by the contemplation of that which passes away" (Goethe).

i. 17. See Mozley's *Parochial and Occasional Sermons* (number xvi.).

ii. 11. "He rushed through life. . . . He desired too much; he wished strongly and greedily to taste life in one draught, thoroughly; he did not glean or taste it, he tore it off like a bunch of grapes, pressing it, crushing it, twisting it; and he remains with stained hands, just as thirsty as before. Then broke forth sobs which found an echo in all hearts" (Taine, on Alfred de Musset).

ii. 4-6, 8, 11. "If any resemblance with Tennyson's poetry is to be found in Ecclesiastes, it should be with the Palace of Art" (Sir Alfred Lyall). See Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto i. iv.-vi., for a description of the dull satiety that follows self-indulgence.

ii. 17. See Quarles' *Emblems*, Bk. i. 6, and the *Religio Medici*, ii. § xiv. (close).

ii. 22 f. "What a deal of cold business doth a man mispend the better part of life in! in scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter-love in a dark corner" (Ben Jonson).

iii. 2. "A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted." "The second of these may describe the times of analysis which often succeed periods of creation. They are not necessarily bad, for they may detect things evil and hollow; but they are times of distrust and unsettlement, and they easily go to excess. Everything is doubted, and in some minds this leads to universal scepticism. We are in such a period now, and it gives the feel-

ing as if the ages of faith were past, and bare rationalism lord of the future. This would resolve everything into dust and death.”<sup>1</sup> (Dr. John Ker’s *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, p. 153.)

iii. 4. *There is a time . . . to laugh.* “Men thin away to insignificance quite as often by not making the most of good spirits when they have them as by lacking good spirits when they are indispensable” (Thomas Hardy).

iii. 8. *There is a time . . . to hate.* “Ah, Sam!” said Carlyle once to Froude, *apropos* of Bishop Wilberforce, “he is a very clever fellow; I do not hate him near as much as I fear I ought to do.” Compare Newman’s lines on *Zeal and Love*.

iii. 11. “What we mean to insist upon is, that in finding out the works of God, the intellect must labour, workman-like, under the direction of the architect—Imagination. . . . ‘He hath set the world in man’s heart,’ not in his understanding, and the heart must open the door to the understanding. It is the far-seeing imagination which beholds what might be a form of things, and says to the intellect, ‘Try whether that may not be the form of these things.’” So George Macdonald writes in his essay on *The Imagination*, which he concludes by quoting Ecclesiastes iii. 10, 11 over again as “setting forth both the necessity we are under to imagine, and the comfort that our imagining cannot outstrip God’s making.” “Thus,” he comments, “thus to be playfellows with God in this game, the little ones may gather their daisies and follow their painted moths; the child of the kingdom may pore upon the lilies of the field, and gather faith as the birds of the air their food from the leafless hawthorn, ruddy with the stores God has laid up for them; and the man of science

<sup>1</sup> See J. S. Mill’s *Autobiography*, p. 137, for a description of its working on himself.

“May sit and rightly spell  
Of every star that heaven doth shew,  
And every herb that sips the dew;  
Till old experience do attain  
To something like prophetic strain.”

iii. 11. “The tree of life is always in bloom somewhere, if we only know where to look” (Havelock Ellis).

iv. 1, 2. Cf. John Morley’s *Critical Miscellanies*, i. pp. 84 f.

iv. 8. See Quarles’ *Emblems*, ii. 2.

iv. 9.

“The help in strife,  
The thousand sweet, still joys of such  
As hand in hand face earthly life.”

(M. Arnold.)

“*Hopeful*. I acknowledge myself in a fault, and had I been here alone, I had by sleeping run the danger of death. I see it is true that the wise man saith, *Two are better than one*. Hitherto hath thy company been my mercy” (Bunyan).

iv. 10. “I drown the past in still hoping for the future, but God knows whether futurity will be as great a cheat as ever. I sometimes think it will. I tell you candidly, I am sometimes out of spirits, and have need of *co-operation*, or Heaven knows yet what will become of my fine castles in the air. So you must bring *spirits, spirits, spirits*” (Cobden to his brother).

iv. 12. “We are three people, but only one soul,” said Coleridge, speaking of Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, and himself.

v. 2 f. “To bind myself to diligence in seeking the Lord, and to stir me up thereto, I made a vow to pray so many times a day; how many times I cannot be positive; but it was at least thrice. It was the goodness of God to me, that it was made only for a definite space of time; but I found it so far from being a help, that it was really a

hindrance to my devotion, making me more heartless in, and averse to, duty, through the corruption of my nature. I got the time of it driven out accordingly; but I never durst make another of that nature since, nor so bind up myself, where God had left me at liberty" (Thomas Boston).

"Do not accustom yourself to enchain your volatility with vows; they will sometimes leave a thorn in your mind, which you will, perhaps, never be able to extract or eject. Take this warning; it is of great importance" (Johnson to Boswell).

*Let thy words be few.* "What people call fluency, and the gift of prayer, is often delusive; it is mere excitement from the presence of others, and from the sound of our own voice" (F. W. Robertson).—"There is no need to say much to God. One often does not talk much to a friend whom one is delighted to see; one enjoys looking at him, and one says some few words which are purely matter of feeling. One does not so much seek interchange of thought as rest and communion of heart with one's friend. Even so it should be with God—a word, a sigh, a thought, a feeling, says everything" (Fénelon).

v. 8. In describing the need for the reforms of Caesar under the new monarchy, Mommsen (*History of Rome*, bk. v. chap. xi.) declares that "the most incurable wounds were inflicted on justice by the doings of the advocates. In proportion as the parasitic plant of Roman forensic eloquence flourished, all positive ideas of right became broken up. . . . A plain, simple defendant, says a Roman advocate of much experience at this period, may be accused of any crime at pleasure which he has, or has not, committed, and will be certainly condemned."

"For a tear is an intellectual thing,  
And a sigh is the sword of an Angel king,  
And the bitter groan of a martyr's woe  
Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow." (Blake.)

“Time’s glory is to calm contending kings,  
To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light,  
To wrong the wronger till he render right.”

(Shakspeare.)

See Lowell’s poem, *Villa Franca*. “The repugnance of man to injustice is with him an early and favourite topic of proof” (Gladstone on Butler).

v. 10. See Ruskin’s *On the Old Road* (ii. § 162) for a comment on “a lover of silver.”

v. 12a.

“When the last dawns are fallen on gray,  
And all life’s toils and ease complete,  
They know who work, not they who play,  
If rest is sweet.” (J. A. Symonds.)

v. 13 f. “To acquire interest on money, and to acquire interest in life are *not* the same thing” (Edward Carpenter).

vi. 8, 9.

“One breast laid open were a school,  
Which would unteach mankind the lust to strive or rule.”  
(Byron.)

vi. 9. W. Morris, on the cravings spired by the ocean :—

“Yea, whoso sees thee from his door,  
Must ever long for more and more;  
Nor will the beechen bowl suffice,  
Or homespun robe of little price,  
Or hood well-woven of the fleece  
Undyed, or unspiced wine of Greece;  
So sore his heart is set upon  
Purple and gold and cinnamon;  
For as thou cravest, so he craves,  
Until he rolls beneath thy waves.”

vii. 2 f. “We are apt to blame society for being constrained and artificial, but its conventionalities are only the result of the limitations of man’s own nature. How much, for instance, of what is called ‘reserve’ belongs to this life, and passes away with its waning, and the waxing

of the new life! We can say to the dying, and hear from them, things that, in the fulness of health and vigour, could not be imparted without violence to some inward instinct. And this is one reason, among many others, why it is so *good* to be in the house of mourning, the chamber of death. It is there more easy to be *natural*,—to be true, I mean, to that which is deepest within us. Is there not something in the daily familiar course of life, which seems in a strange way to veil its true aspect? It is not Death, but Life, which wraps us about with shroud and cerement" (Dora Greenwell, *Two Friends*, pp. 38, 39). Compare Sterne's famous sermon on this text ("So strange and unaccountable a creature is man! He is so framed that he cannot but pursue happiness, and yet, unless he is made sometimes miserable, how apt he is to mistake the way which can only lead him to the accomplishment of his own wishes," etc.).

vii. 2 f. "Every one observes how temperate and reasonable men are when humbled and brought low by afflictions, in comparison of what they are in high prosperity. By this voluntary resort unto the house of mourning, which is here recommended, we might learn all these useful instructions which calamities teach, without undergoing them ourselves, and grow wiser and better at a more easy rate than men commonly do. . . . This would correct the florid and gaudy prospects and expectations which we are too apt to indulge, teach us to lower our notions of happiness and enjoyment, bring them down to the reality of things, to what is attainable" (Bishop Butler).

"Dark is the realm of grief: but human things  
Those may not know who cannot weep for them."

(Shelley.)

vii. 5. "It is the sinful unhappiness of some men's minds that they usually disaffect those that cross them in

their corrupt proceedings, and plainly tell them of their faults. They are ready to judge of the reprovcr's spirit by their own, and to think that all such sharp reproof proceed from some disaffection to their persons, or partial opposition to the opinions which they hold. But plain dealers are always approved in the end, and the time is at hand when you shall confess these were your truest friends" (Richard Baxter, preface to the *Reformed Pastor*).

"A truth told us is harder to bear than a hundred which we tell ourselves" (Fénelon).

vii. 6.

"I think the immortal servants of mankind,  
Who, from their graves, watch by how slow degrees  
The world-soul greatens with the centuries,  
Mourn most man's barren levity of mind,  
The ear to no grave harmonies inclined,  
The witless thirst for false wit's worthless lees,  
The laugh mistimed in tragic presences,  
The eye to all majestic meanings blind."

(William Watson.)

"During that time" (his agitation on behalf of Calas' descendants) "not a smile escaped me without my reproaching myself for it, as for a crime" (Voltaire).

"Froude," said Keble once to Hurrell Froude, "you said you thought Law's *Serious Call* was a clever book; it seemed to me as if you had said the Day of Judgment will be a pretty sight."

"Prithee weep, May Lilian!  
Gaiety without eclipse  
Wearieth me, May Lilian!"

(Tennyson.)

vii. 8, 9. "There is not a greater foe to spirituality than wrath; and wrath even in a righteous cause distempers the heart" (Chalmers).

vii. 10. "An obsolete discipline may be a present

heresy" (Newman). See also Ben Jonson's *Discoveries*, §§ xxi., cxxiii. :—

"I count him wise,  
Who loves so well man's noble memories,  
He needs must love man's nobler hopes yet more."  
(W. Watson.)

"But for the new world and its ways,  
And all the great hopes of the latter days,  
Their science and its expanding views,  
New-fangled craving for latest news,  
And workmen striking for higher wage,  
And all that mostly our thoughts engage—  
For them he kept strictly a yearly Fast,  
Each year bitterer than the last—  
It fell when Culloden's day begins,  
And he called it the Fast of all the Sins."  
(W. C. Smith.)

Carlyle, said Maurice once, believes in a God who lived till the death of Oliver Cromwell. See Spenser's sonnet on Scanderberg.

"We shall not acknowledge that old stars fade or alien planets arise,  
That the sere bush buds or the desert blooms or the ancient well-head dries,  
Or any new compass wherewith new men adventure 'neath new skies."  
(Kipling.)

"Both in politics and in art Plato seems to have seen no way of bringing order out of disorder, except by taking a step backwards. Antiquity, compared with the world in which he lived, had a sacredness and authority for him; the men of a former age were supposed by him to have had a sense of reverence which was wanting among his contemporaries" (Jowett).

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(To be continued.)